



**Office of the Attorney General  
Paul G. Summers**

**Department of Commerce and Insurance  
Commissioner Paula Flowers**

**CONSUMER ALERT**

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**ATTORNEY GENERAL WARNS CONSUMERS TO BEWARE OF INTERNATIONAL  
INVESTMENT, MAIL FRAUD SCAMS**

If you receive a letter or e-mail from someone seeking a “foreign partner” to help transfer millions of dollars from Nigeria, report it to authorities and then delete it or throw it away. It is most likely an advance fee fraud that preys on people looking to make easy money, says Tennessee Attorney General Paul G. Summers.

“The promise of good money for little work is very intriguing to many,” Attorney General Summers said, “and we want to make sure Tennesseans know they could lose their money as a result of these empty promises.”

The advance fee fraud has been perpetuated so much, the Central Bank of Nigeria has been prompted in the past to issue notices to the media that no official agency in Nigeria is involved in such illegal activity. Consumers are often sent fake government documents proposing the fraudulent business deal.

It usually begins with someone asking for help transferring large amounts of money to the United States as proceeds from a bogus will or other phony business transaction with promises of a share of the funds. The solicitor will ask the recipient to keep the matter confidential regardless

of their response to the offer. If the consumer agrees to participate, the con artist will eventually ask for a never-ending assortment of advance fees to cover “legal costs,” “taxes,” or even “government bribes” supposedly to process the funds.

“Obviously, the sole purpose of the fraud is to obtain these advance fees,” Summers said. “Once they get as much money from you as possible, you will never hear from them again.”

Mary Clement, Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs, warns, “This type of e-mail solicitation may become more prevalent now that legislation has been enacted to prohibit unsolicited faxes. As with any email, the consumer should never open an email from an unknown sender. These communications could contain a myriad of attachments or viruses that automatically download themselves onto the consumer's system. Consumers can call the Division of Consumer Affairs with any questions or concerns.”

The targeted victims are often business professionals, doctors or lawyers. The e-mail or letter often claims the solicitor needs a “professional” person to conduct the fraudulent business. In some cases, charities and religious institutions have been solicited with promises of bogus inheritances under a will. Sometimes, the scam is promoting the sale of crude oil at below market prices.

State officials offer the following tips to help you identify a potential scam:

- \*The solicitor is often an “auditor, accountant” or “doctor.”
- \*The correspondence usually offers a commission of at least \$10 million in exchange for assistance with the money transfer to the United States.
- \*You may be encouraged to travel overseas to complete the transaction.
- \*The solicitor generally provides numerous forged documents with official-looking stamps, seals, and logos to validate the phony offer.
- \*Postal Inspectors note that the stamps on the letters are often counterfeit, as are any meter impressions since postage meters aren’t used in Nigeria.
- \*The letters are often type and photocopied and usually marked “urgent” and “confidential.”
- \*Many times the victim will be asked to provide blank company letterhead, which will later be used to write fake recommendations to other potential victims.

“If it looks like easy money, it probably is--but only for the con artist, not for you,” Attorney General Summers said. “It is unlikely a reputable business would ask you to advance these sorts of fees and then ask a consumer to keep the matter ‘confidential.’”

If you suspect you are being solicited by a con artist, you may contact the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at 1-800342-8385, the U.S. Secret Service at 202-406-5850 or send the suspicious correspondence to the Inspection Service Operations Support Group, Two

gateway Center, 9<sup>th</sup> floor, Newark, NJ 07175-0001.